

Allegheny Portage Railroad, Stable Bend Tunnel
Allegheny Portage Railroad National Historic Site
Conemaugh Borough .25 miles East of Conrail Bridge
Geistown Vicinity
Cambria County
Pennsylvania

HAER No. PA-240

HAER
PA,
11-GEISTOWN,
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

ALLEGHENY PORTAGE RAILROAD, STAPLE BEND TUNNEL

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HAER No. PA-240

Location: Allegheny Portage Railroad National Historic Site, Conemaugh Borough,
.25 miles E of Conrail Bridge across Conemaugh River, E of Parkhill,
Geistown Vicinity, Cambria County, Pennsylvania

USGS Quad: Geistown, Pennsylvania (1:24000)
UTM: 17 E.682120 N.4469620

Date of Construction: 1828-1834

Builder: Allegheny Portage Railroad

Present Owner: Bethlehem Steel Corporation

Present Use: Abandoned

Significance: The Staple Bend Tunnel is proclaimed to be the first railroad tunnel in
the United States.

Project Information: In February 1987, the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER)
and the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) began a multi-year
historical and architectural documentation project in southwestern
Pennsylvania. Carried out in conjunction with America's Industrial
Heritage Project (AIHP), HAER undertook a comprehensive inventory
of Blair and Cambria counties as the first step in identifying the region's
surviving historic engineering works and industrial resources.

The results of this project have been published in Blair County and
Cambria County, Pennsylvania: An Inventory of Historic Engineering
and Industrial Sites (1990), edited by Gray Fitzsimons and produced by
HABS/HAER for the National Park Service.

See also HABS No. PA-1233, ALLEGHENY PORTAGE RAILROAD,
STAPLE BEND TUNNEL, Conemaugh Township, Geistown Vicinity,
Cambria County, Pennsylvania. This file contains two photographs from
1965 and two drawings previously transmitted to the Library of
Congress.

Compiler: Peter Stott, Historian
Gray Fitzsimons, Editor

History:

The Staple Bend Tunnel, one of the least known, yet most important American railroad sites, was constructed between 1828 and 1834. It is proclaimed to be the first railroad tunnel in the United States and is located between Inclined Plane Nos. 1 and 2 of the Allegheny Portage Railroad on the so-called "Long Level". Measuring 901' in length, the tunnel was built by lining the first 150' at each end with cut stone. The 600' in the middle was cut through solid rock. Each opening was surrounded by a classical facade consisting of four Tuscan pilasters supporting a full entablature of ashlar sandstone. Unfortunately, only the southern portal remains intact. The cost of construction for the tunnel amounted to \$37,498. When the Portage Railroad fell into decline after the completion of the Pennsylvania Railroad, the tunnel was abandoned. It is currently owned by the Bethlehem Steel Corporation and is sealed at both ends with concrete-block infill and steel plates.

Sources:

National Park Service. "Staple Bend Tunnel Field Inventory Report". Johnstown Flood Museum Library, (typewritten).